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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000257

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2018

TAGS: PREL KWBG JO IS

SUBJECT: JORDANIAN CONDEMNATION OF AND DEMONSTRATIONS  
AGAINST ISRAELI STEPS IN GAZA

REF: A. 07 AMMAN 04584

1B. 07 AMMAN 04623

1C. 07 AMMAN 04733

1D. AMMAN 00149

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Jordanian officials up through King Abdullah and the Queen have reacted with dismay - and portions of the public (egged on by the Islamic Action Front) more angrily - to the intensification of Israel's "siege" of the Gaza Strip.

The government has condemned Israeli policies and dispatched an aid convoy to Gaza (unlikely to reach its destination), while leaders of the IAF have used the developments as an excuse to repeat their calls for abandoning the peace treaty with Israel. End Summary.

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GOJ Reacts With Condemnations and Humanitarian Gestures  
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12. (C) Responding to an exceptionally negative public mood, the King has publicly condemned Israel's military "violations" and raised his concern about the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Gaza. He ordered an aid convoy bearing medicine and food to Gaza, while Queen Rania has made high-profile visits to hospitalized Gazans receiving treatment in Jordan, and called on the international community to "stop the collective punishment of innocent civilians."

13. (C) Senior ministers similarly have condemned the Israeli actions in phone calls to their counterparts in Israel. Prime Minister Nader Dahabi, after meeting this week with Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, expressed concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, and said Jordan is "focused at this stage on putting an end to Israeli military violations in the Gaza Strip, which claimed the lives of innocent civilians." The local media reported that Foreign Minister Salaheddin al-Bashir called Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni on Monday to urge Israel to stop its military operations in Gaza and to end "collective punishment" against the Palestinian people. (Israeli Ambassador Rosen told the Ambassador that the transcript of the call showed a Foreign Minister far less aggressive than he appeared in his press release.)

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Commentariat Blames the U.S.  
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14. (SBU) In addition to significant treatment by the respective news departments of the local media, the commentariat has taken up the Gaza issue with a vengeance, typically drawing a straight line between Israel's current activities and a perceived lack of U.S. seriousness toward

the peace process. Editor-in-Chief of the Arab nationalist al-Arab al-Yawm, Taher Odwan, viewed developments in Gaza as a "flagrant headline of the failure of the ongoing approach to the peace process with Israel." Columnist Oraib Rantawi wrote in the pro-Palestinian Ad-Dustour that "Gaza's wound dictates to the Palestinian and Arab leaderships a firm stand vis-a-vis the Annapolis meeting which turned out to be designed solely to buy time and provide a cover for aggression and settlements." Also in Ad-Dustour, Ibrahim al-Absi blamed the U.S. for Israel's "merciless war" on Gaza, arguing that if Washington had "genuinely been serious about the peace-making process, it would not have given Israel the green light to commit such a crime." The English-language Jordan Times editorialized that it is "an absolute joke, for an American president to come and talk about peace in a year when the American administration will not even lift a finger to prevent the most egregious obstacles to such peace."

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IAF Makes Hay Slamming Israel ... and, by Extension, the GOJ

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¶ 15. (C) Even before the latest Israeli actions to cut off electricity and gas supplies to Gaza, the opposition (read: the Islamic Action Front, political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood) had been attacking Israel's military operations in the Strip, to include repeating its perennial calls on the government to break its ties with the "Zionist enemy." Comment: Directing ire at Israel is probably a safe bet for the Jordanian opposition, and provides a way to criticize backhandedly the government; although not a new approach, it is probably more palatable to the average Jordanian than was the IAF's support for Hamas that some observers believe hurt its performance in the 2007 elections (refs A-C). End

AMMAN 00000257 002 OF 002

Comment.

¶ 16. (SBU) The Israeli actions in Gaza also set off demonstrations this week ranging in size - according to press estimates - from several hundred to several thousand protestors in refugee camps in and outside of Amman, including Hittin, Al-Wihdat, and Al-Baq'ah. In each case, IAF leaders were the forefront. Al-Jazirah broadcast IAF Secretary General Zaki Bani Irsheid addressing demonstrators

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with barely veiled criticisms of the Jordanian government: "Jordan . . . is not a Zionist police station. Jordan is not a U.S. embassy." IAF parliamentary bloc leader Hamzah Mansur proclaimed that Jordanians, as part of the Arab and Islamic community, "are against the siege, blackout, and conspiracy against Gaza." And IAF parliamentarian Muhammad Aqil addressed protesters during a march of an estimated 3000 residents of Baq'ah camp, located northwest of Amman. Separately, Members of Parliament called for the expulsion of the Israeli and American Ambassadors to protest Israel's actions in Gaza and perceived U.S. support.

¶ 17. (C) Comment: The Jordanian government, with the King at the forefront, has and continues to be an enthusiastic supporter of the resumed peace process, seeing its own vital interests in a resolution of the Palestinian issue (ref D). Senior officials privately blame Hamas for provoking Israel at a hopeful diplomatic moment. But humanitarian conditions in Gaza put them on the defensive with their own public. Among our interlocutors, even those who are cautiously optimistic about the revived peace process have been warning that absent quick improvements in life for Palestinians the peace process will founder and extremists will benefit. That said, while the official consternation expressed toward the recent Israeli steps is real, the public condemnations and symbolic moves to aid the Palestinians are as much directed at the Jordanian public and critics of the GOJ as they are at Israel and the Palestinians. End Comment.

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